Most readers agree that stories by Mr. Temple are too few and far between but when he does find time to stop writing fine novels for the juvenile field we can usually be sure of something worthwhile from him. "Uncle" Buno, like his creator, is something of a character.

UNCLE BUNO

By WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

Illustrated by QUINN

He was always "Uncle" Buno to me, though of course he wasn't my uncle—he was a Martian. I had no true uncles. As if they blamed themselves for the lack, my parents always introduced their male guests to me as "Uncle" this or "Uncle" that. A common enough custom, but they kept at it when I was past the kid stuff.

I must have been around twelve when Uncle Buno came. I guess that's the age when a lot of the glory starts to pass from the earth. A year or two later comes puberty and then imagination becomes channeled for a time largely in one direction. "Romance" ceases to mean besieged castles or mysterious space wrecks off Jupiter or heroics in Normandy, and comes very much down to earth. Sex is *the* fascinating mystery.

It still is something of a mystery to me, for I've never married nor pursued any sexual adventure to its natural climax. Polio in infancy withered my limbs and didn't do much for my self-confidence. I hated being a burden to anyone. It was pain enough to have been a burden to my parents.

My father was vital and impatient, with frank eyes. Too frank, maybe, for they said what he thought even when he was silent. They said: "Too bad about you, Paul. We've both had a raw deal. I wanted you out in the spaceways with me. Maybe sometime you'd have your own ship too, and we'd stage a clipper race. Or fire rocket salutes at each other just for the gag. Or rendezvous in Syrtis Major City and . . . But no. It's too bad."

You have to be physically one hundred per cent to be a spaceship skipper.

What opinions my mother had of me she kept to herself. When I was very small, needing the assurance of constant love, like any kid, I used to ask her: "Do you love me, Ma?"

Sometimes she replied "Don't ask silly questions, Paul," and sometimes she just didn't seem to hear me. And presently I ceased to ask, because I knew.

When I was ten she wasn't even there to ask.

Pop had been on the Earth-Mars run for a long spell at that time. Too long for Ma, who could never be called patient either. She went off one day with the man I'd been taught to call "Uncle Barry," and I never saw either of them again. Of course, there was a divorce, but I wasn't told anything about that.

I was sent to live with "Uncle Vic," while Pop went back on the Earth-Mars run. Then one hot Sunday his little green car appeared from the August dust-clouds, and when he stepped out he patted me on the head and walked past me as though it were a casual encounter. And I hadn't seen him in eight months. He talked with Uncle Vic, and my things were packed, and he told me to get in the car with him. We drove off.

"Where are we going, Pop?"

"Home, Paul."

"Is . . . Is Ma back?"

He frowned over the wheel.

"She won't ever be back, son. Forget her. Your Uncle Buno will take care of you for the next couple of years. Then you'll be a big boy, and pretty soon go to college and get a degree. Mathematics, huh—how about that?"

My heart sank. "I'll never get a degree in maths, Pop. I was never any good at it. I've tried, but figures . . . I just can't seem to *see* figures in my head."

"Don't worry. Uncle Buno is going to coach you. One way and another he knows the score. If he weren't Martian, he'd amount to something."

"A Martian?"

"That's what I said."

At that time there was far more racial prejudice against Martians than there is now. They were looked upon as an inferior species. Yet they were much like us in appearance, except that they were albinos. But Mars was a poor, spent planet, and they were a spiritless, lack lustre people for the most part, and their standard of living was low. Like poor people everywhere, they were not respected, especially as sometimes they were forced to beg. Mars became known as "the beggar Earth."

Most of them were too listless to desire change, but a few wished to emigrate to Earth—and straightway ran into a "Keep the Martians Out" barrier. Only a handful negotiated it, through string-pulling

by really important Terrestrials, like senators, diplomats, big business tycoons—or spaceship captains.

I understood that Martians made good house servants. They never answered back.

I had never seen one in the flesh. Uncle Buno was striking. He wasn't in the house when we got there, and we found him sitting on a canvas-topped stool at the end of the garden, painting in oils.

The picture on the easel was of the farm below, in the valley. I'd seen the farm countless times, played there until I knew the appearance of every knot in the timber of and about it. But I'd never seen it like it was on the canvas. It transcended two dimensions, even three. It was Valley Farm set imperishably in its place in the space-time continuum, glowingly alive. Its very particles seemed to be moving to the rhythms of this wave-shot universe.

Even my father said: "That's pretty good, Buno."

Uncle Buno regarded us mildly, tolerantly. I could see our appreciation meant little to him. He was tall and spare with a noticeably erect back. It's not easy to judge a Martian's age in Earth-years, but I should have guessed he was thirty. One had to ignore the thick white hair—Martian babies are born with white hair. His eyes were light-lashed, pink-lidded, and the irises were as pale as his skin.

Because of this lack of pigmentation, his general effect might reasonably have been bleak. It wasn't.

Because he shrugged off our praise for his work, his attitude might reasonably have been condescending. It wasn't.

He knew that his real critic was not the layman, not the connoisseur, not even time. It was himself. Or rather, the artist in him who told him: "This feels right. This *is* right. It says everything."

And there was no need for anyone else to say anything.

"This is Paul," said my father, introducing me. The tall Martian looked down at me, seated though he was, and I felt the warmth of friendliness flow from him to me. It was a magic moment. I'd never experienced anything quite like it before. I'd received little but coldness from my mother and indifference from my father.

"If I can serve as your mentor, I'm sure we shall both learn, Paul," said Uncle Buno. His English was perfect, his voice pleasantly deep.

I didn't know the meaning of "mentor." My father did, in his usual limited way. He said: "Uncle Buno will give you at least a grounding in three-dimensional geometry."

Then I saw my father's new hope plainly. I couldn't become a space-skipper like him, but I might become the next-best thing: a

space-navigator. Most captains leaned heavily on their navigators, whose prestige therefore was high. You could become a navigator even if you had only one arm. The brain was the important thing. The only necessary function of the body was its ability to push a pencil.

There was a time when prophets said digital computors would oust navigators. Sometimes they still said it, but spacemen didn't believe them any more. Computers were still too heavy for the smaller ships. And on the bigger ships someone had to know the questions to ask them.

I hoped Uncle Buno was a magician. It would take a magician to make me understand mathematics.

Well, he tried. He was patient and kind. I tried, too. At first because I wanted to please Pop and become a navigator. Later because I wanted to please Uncle Buno.

He taught me to appreciate art in many forms, but painting chiefly. Until then, sunsets were to me but the end of a day, presaging bed. He made me see them. He never missed one if he could help it. We sat watching together in the garden, and he would name all the shades of colour that smeared the tumbled clouds, amending the list as they faded, brightened, changed. He taught me how to sketch and label them, so that their glory could be resurrected and fixed on canvas the next day.

With new eyes I saw the marvellously intermingled colours of flowers, the structure of trees, the form of the land, the delicacy of living creatures. Yet I knew that, compared with his perception, I was seeing them through smoked glasses.

He even got me interested in mathematics. Interested, but not very able.

Time and again he told me: " If only you could see it, Paul, mathematics has all the delight of painting. The *rightness* of equations as they work out, each part falling into place so inevitably, gives supreme aesthetic satisfaction. It's fate itself—in figures."

" Figures !" I echoed gloomily.

" Figures, yes. Think of figure-skating, Paul—sweeping, interlacing curves. The curves of graphs are no less beautiful. And they're only two-dimensional. With the extra dimension, in three-dimensional geometry, they come alive. They dance in your brain to fine music! Oh, if only I could make you see !"

But he couldn't.

The long summer faded, the wind began to moan, and the winter snows came delicately but inexorably to block the valley.

I remember one night I went out to the woodshed and on the way was enraptured, uplifted, by the spectacle of the Milky Way. It was a procession of thousands of infinitely distant torchbearers marching across a sable sky arched over a glimmering floor of snow.

The planets shone more steadily, like signal lamps. Somewhere up there, awfully remote, my father was guiding his ship through the immensities. And yet, as I was realizing now, his was not the guiding brain. A keen, clever-faced man, Norridge—I had met him—sat in a smaller cabin, among his charts, dividers, and electronic instruments, and was the power behind the throne.

Father respected Norridge. If I could become like Norridge he would respect me also and forget my physical weakness.

Then I saw Uncle Buno leaning against the side of the shed. He was staring up at the sky too, but only at its lower rim. The snow seemed to shine with its own light and his pale face, paler yet, was visible. I followed his gaze and saw an unwinking red dot of light, low on the horizon. Mars.

I could see his expression only dimly, but unmistakeably it was sad.

He became aware of me, turned, smiled. . .

" Hello, Paul. I was thinking of getting something of this "—he swept his arm vaguely before him—" on canvas. Call it ' Winter Nocturne,' eh ?"

But I felt he'd been thinking about something else.

He helped me carry wood back. We made up a roaring fire and sat by it. I watched the red-lit shadows playing over his face and wondered. Through the summer and fall we had walked far and talked much of general things. But he had always been reticent about his background, his way of life on Mars. I had learnt that he was married, his wife's name was Jona, and they had no children. It pleased me that he had no children of his own, for I was lonely enough and greedy enough of his affection to have been really jealous.

It was childish jealousy which made me ask: " Do you miss Aunt Jona, Uncle ?"

He looked into the fire and said quietly: " Of course, Paul."

" Can't she come and stay with us, then ? Father's away most of the time. We've plenty of room."

" The immigration laws don't allow it. Your father had trouble in getting permission for me to stay only two years."

" Oh, aren't they silly ! I think people should be able to come and go as they please."

Uncle Buno smiled. " Politicians don't think like we artists."

" Do you think Aunt Jona would like it here ?"

" Yes, I do."

"One day," I said, shrilly, "I'll get to be President and change these stupid old laws! Then Aunt Jona can come."

"But I thought you wanted to be a space-navigator?"

"Oh—*that*! I'll never be that. I can't figure well enough."

For the first time since I'd known him I saw anxiety touch him. He frowned. "We'll do a little revision, Paul," he said, decisively, and reached for a book. It was *Elementary Orbits* and my spirits fell, for there was nothing elementary about the contents of thet book to me. Besides, I'd hoped we were in for a nice cosy chat by the fire, and that at last I should learn something of Aunt Jona's and Uncle Buno's home life.

But it was astrogation for the rest of that evening. I didn't do so well, and went to bed unhappy, knowing that Uncle Buno was unhappy also.

I progressed slowly with maths through the winter, but much faster with learning Martian, written and spoken. Maybe it was because I had a flair for languages, as Uncle Buno surmised. More probably it was because it was my own idea and I was under no compulsion.

My painting was coming on, too, but I knew I could never hope to be more than a second-rate artist. The example of the first-rate was before my eyes all the time. Whenever he was through coaching for the day, Uncle Buno began to mix his colours, prepare his brushes and canvases, and, amazingly quickly, produce a masterpiece before the daylight quite faded. The weather hampered him little. If it rained, he'd keep at it till he'd wrought a rainswept landscape that glistened even after it was dry. In gales he would stand like a rock, the long white hair streaming, until he captured in paint the row of tortured elms.

He did still-life too, seeing beneath the surface of commonplace things like a super-Cézanne.

He did only one portrait. That was of my father. I could hardly recognize it. There were the frank eyes, all right, but there was kindness in them. I had never seen that look myself in my father's eyes. I doubted very much that Uncle Buno had, for Pop was becoming increasingly curt and impatient with him. It was dawning on father that his dream for me was no more than a dream.

I applied myself until my mind reeled and my skull felt it would crack open trying to discover the sense in mathematics. My advance was snail-slow.

During my summer vacation my father put me on trial. He'd asked Norridge to get out a reasonably simple test paper on astrogation. After some high pressure preparatory coaching by Uncle Buno, who again showed signs of anxiety, I faced the paper.

I doodled, chewed the end of my pen, held my head, and finally all but burst into tears through frustration.

I answered one question out of nine and then got it only half right. My father made no verbal comment. His eyes showed disappointment so deep it was grief.

Uncle Buno was sad, too, though also saying nothing. As I was going to bed that evening, he said goodnight by the stairs and, surprisingly, held my hand for a moment. "Don't worry, Paul," he said, quietly. "I still think you can do it."

He pressed my hand and relinquished it. "Write me sometimes, won't you?" he said, and turned back into the lounge.

"What was that, Uncle?" I called after him, but the door closed on him.

In the morning, I overslept and came down just in time to see father's green car pulling into the drive. I wondered where Pop had been.

I sought Uncle Buno. I wanted him to explain his parting remark. He was nowhere around. Dad came in.

"Have you seen Uncle Buno?" I asked.

"I have. I've just taken him to the station. He's catching the next ship back to Mars. You were sound asleep, so I didn't waken you."

I stood there like an idiot, my mouth open. I'd gone numb in mind and body. At last, I stammered: "He wanted to go back to Aunt Jona?"

"I expect that was it."

"How—how long will he be away?"

Pop compressed his lips. "He's not coming back, Paul."

"Oh!" The exclamation was more anguish than surprise. A terrible feeling of loss and desolating loneliness came over me. Uncle Buno had become more than a part of my life. He *was* my life—I lived through him, seeing the world with his eyes and with something of his understanding. He had made it seem a very wonderful place.

I went back to my room to fight my misery in solitude.

I don't know how much later it was when I wandered into what had been Uncle Buno's room and found the neat stack of his canvases still there, and his palette, paint tubes, and brushes on the rack under the easel. They sent another stab of pain through me, and then I began to feel glad. At worst, he'd left something of himself behind. At best, surely it meant he intended to return eventually? He wouldn't just abandon the tools of his craft—I knew what painting meant to him.

I mentioned it to Pop.

He said: " I paid him in advance for two years' tuition for you. He spent the credits on Mars before he came—mostly on household things for his wife. So he still owes me a year's work. Or owed, rather."

" Owed ?"

" He offered his paintings and materials in lieu of returning the credits. I accepted. They're no use to me, of course, but maybe you can use 'em."

" Oh, father—couldn't you have let him off for that one year ?"

My father looked at me strangely, and then looked away. " Uncle Buno was not like the general run of Martians. He had pride. He didn't want to take something for nothing."

Yes, that was like Uncle Buno. But somehow I felt something was being kept from me.

" Pop," I said, " did you *send* Uncle Buno home ?"

He still wouldn't look at me. " Yes, Paul, I did."

I tried not to hate him. " But it wasn't his fault I'm so slow at learning. I was getting better at maths really I was."

He made no answer. That meant he didn't believe me. I wasn't sure that I believed myself. And that made me angrier.

I blurted out: " You never did care about me, and he did. That's what you didn't like about him. You don't want anybody to like me. You were jealous of him—that's why you sent him away."

He was surprisingly patient. Without raising his voice, he answered: " You're contradicting yourself there, son. You'll never learn maths until you learn to think logically. Better go out and get some air and cool off."

I ran out of the house, down into the valley, among the trees where it was quiet and I could be alone. I wandered there for hours, mentally composing letters to Uncle Buno. Sometimes I urged him to return, saying he could stay at the farm, because they were my friends there, and I would see him every day. Sometimes I hinted at my stowing away on a ship to Mars—maybe even Pop's ship—and coming to live with him and Aunt Jona. The plans were all childish, impracticable, and—illogical.

Nevertheless, I wrote actual letters very like them during the following weeks. I received but one answer. I came across it the other day, among my once cherished collection of interplanetary stamps. It said :

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letters. I should like to return to Earth, but it isn't possible. Your Aunt Jona is well and sends you her love.

Uncle Buno.

That was all, in return for my pouring out my heart in my boyish, uninhibited letters. Aunt Jona sent her love but Uncle Buno didn't.

I responded indignantly, asking why he had requested me to write him at all, if my letters were to be largely ignored. He ignored that one completely—at least, no answer came.

I was miserable for a long time. I tried to paint, but without Uncle Buno's encouragement there seemed little point in it. When I compared my daubs with the work he'd left, there seemed even less point to it.

Sometimes I imagined him sitting before his easel, beside one of the stagnant canals, capturing the quiet mood of a Martian evening—the blue, star-pricked sky, the green scum on the canal contrasting with the orange desert all blending somehow into significant life on his canvas.

Then I would bite my lip and vow that, if Uncle Buno couldn't come to me, then I should go to him. Somehow I would get to Mars.

Every time Pop returned from Mars, I'd pounce to ask whether he'd seen Uncle Buno. Often he had not been near Buno's village. And when he had visited him, the report was always brief and unsatisfying. "Uncle Buno? Sure, he's rubbing along okay."

At such times I often noticed my father looked hurt, as though he were pained by my being more interested in Uncle Buno's affairs than his. I put it down to nothing more admirable than wounded vanity.

Eventually I went to college and found companionship. I even found what I thought was my vocation. It wasn't painting or art in any form or farming or any of the professions I thought I might adopt. It was the last thing I'd imagined I was fitted for—mathematics.

All the divisions of maths I'd struggled with and despaired of merged into one meaningful whole in my eighteenth year. Uncle Buno had been right all along. I had the gift. It had taken long to mature.

All the groundwork Uncle Buno had put in for me hadn't been wasted. It had taken root down there in my subconscious. Now suddenly it had flowered and borne fruit.

I spent most of a vacation studying for a degree in pure maths. Near the end of it I felt safe and sure enough to quit, put away my books, and loaf around.

Pop—who these days was a changed person, manifestly proud of my progress—was out in space, and I had the house to myself. I went into what had been Uncle Buno's room, dug out all of his paintings and arranged them as a one-man exhibition. I hadn't looked at them closely in years. As I sat scrutinizing them now, it seemed to me more than ever that they were works of genius.

I'd never lost my interest in art, and college had given me the opportunities to study the works of the masters, old and new. So I looked at Buno's work with some understanding of the way he'd handled the technical side of it, besides feeling the direct impact of the pictures. I didn't think he had a thing to learn from any painter before or after Michelangelo.

A college buddy happened to be the son of an art dealer who combined the aesthetic and business senses. I got him to persuade his old man to come and take a look at a Martian's views of Earth. The novelty was the bait and it drew the dealer.

He came on a day which is a date in art history. Buno was officially "discovered." The dealer saw to it that it didn't remain just a personal discovery. He pushed Buno. It seemed odd to me that he had to do any pushing at all. I said to him one day: "Surely the pictures sell themselves? Why, you've only got to take one look at them—they hit you like a sunburst."

"There's an awful lot of people who don't know whether the sun's shining or not, Paul," he said. "The ones who do rarely have the money. It's the other kind we've got to sell the pictures to. If it weren't for the money, this game would have broken my heart long ago. Believe me, I'd like to have all the Bunos on *my* walls. But if I don't sell 'em, I soon shouldn't have any walls to hang them on."

It was years before Bunos became safe canvas currency among the rich and the big money came rolling in. At that time I was neck-deep in a course at the School of Astrogation and my respect for space-navigators rivalled that for artists. I'd imagined I had mastered maths. Now I realized I was still down in the foot-hills.

No wonder any space-skipper who knew anything at all was always polite to his navigator.

Father insisted the Buno paintings were mine and therefore the proceeds were also. I had other views about that, and just salted the cash away. I'd written Buno a couple of times about his growing fame on Earth, repeating that I'd be glad to see him. I should have, too, though I had plenty on my plate and my days were full. I wasn't a lonely kid any more. I had many friends now, and some close ones who shared my work. So when Uncle Buno failed to reply, I was disappointed but not heartbroken.

One day the dealer came right out to the School to see me. As we strolled under the elms in the sharp spring sunlight he said: "You have seven Bunos left, haven't you?"

"That's right. My favourites. I'm keeping them."

"Wouldn't you rather keep twenty-five thousand pounds? That's what I'll give you for them."

"My, my. Where have you been lately—slumming?"

"All right, Paul—thirty thousand."

"But I have a sentimental regard for this batch."

"How much is your sentiment worth—thirty-five thousand?"

I considered. "You can have six for that. One I must keep." I was thinking of the Valley Farm painting, the one Buno had been doing when I first met him.

The dealer sighed. "You're wasting your time on the wrong kind of figures here, Paul. You should have gone on the Stock Exchange. Hang onto that last one long enough and it'll be worth thirty-five thousand by itself—if the fashion doesn't change. That's what you've got to watch."

"To hell with fashion! 'Valley Farm' is worth precisely what I think it's worth and—believe it or not—I don't think in terms of money. If you want more Bunos why don't you go to Mars and buy them direct from the producer? I should have thought that by this time half your profession would be standing in line at his door."

The dealer coughed. "They all think Buno's signed up exclusively to me. I just let 'em think. Why haven't I gone? Space travel makes me sick."

"Send a representative, then."

"No, you don't understand, Paul. To make this game pay, you've got to balance one thing against another. You can have too much of a good thing. Rarity value counts more in this racket than in any other. To squeeze the last penny from this Buno panic we'll want him to produce no more than one painting a year. Genius or not, overproduction will kill the market. Besides, the public is still sold on the Martian view of Earth angle. They don't give a darn about the Martian view of Mars. Tell you what you do. Get your pal to come back here and paint another twenty, say, and they'll keep him in luxury for the rest of his life. We'll peddle them out, one by one."

I thought that over, and said I'd write Buno. Then I thought it over some more. I wasn't bothered about squeezing out the last penny for Buno. I had plenty stashed away for him already. I'd planned to take it to him personally in the shape of Martian credits on my very first trip as a space-navigator. I felt I had a big debt to repay him.

Often I pictured the scene: my bursting in on them, in my new uniform, making Buno happy because his faith in my mathematical ability had been vindicated, making Jona happy because she would be able to buy all the household gadgets she'd ever fancied.

How we'd talk ! In Martian too, for I was really glib in that tongue now.

But the more I thought about it, the more remote that happy picture seemed. I was moving on very slippery ground at the School of Astrogation and not always forward. Maybe I'd been over-ambitious. I had a talent for maths certainly, but was it good enough to carry me into the ranks of the select band of navigators ?

When I learned that nineteen out of twenty students, on the average, were plowed, I sweated.

Yes, I wanted Uncle Buno to come back. Not just for his kindness or his company. Not even for his own sake, that he might reap his reward in fame and money on Earth. But for my sake, because I

needed to be helped like a lame dog over a stile. I knew he was my last chance. None other could make the enormously advanced mathematics intelligible to me. Without further guidance from him I knew in my heart I should never become a space-navigator.

So I wrote him at once, telling him all this, imploring him to come back. I pointed out that there would be no difficulty about a permit to stay, for he was a world celebrity now and everyone would welcome him with open arms. The Ministry of Culture would make his path easy, ankle-deep in rose petals.

Not long after I'd mailed the letter, Pop dropped over to the School to see how I was making out. I was frank about it, and told him I'd written to Buno, and why I had.

He said: "Paul, I wish you hadn't done that."

"But you *do* still want me to become a navigator?"

"Sure. But not at the cost of Buno's life."

"*What?*"

"You haven't met any other Martians but Buno, Paul?"

"No, I haven't."

"There are a couple working at the Washington Spaceport. Take a look at them if you're ever that way. Then you may learn why the Immigration Board aren't so hard-hearted as you'd supposed, and why the two-year limit obtains. Those two Martians look like bent old men and move like tortoises, yet neither is as old as Buno. If they hadn't been near the starvation level, it would have been no charity to give them terrestrial jobs."

"But why, Pop?"

"Gravity drag, of course. It's nearly three times what they're used to, you know. I suppose you never thought of that because Buno never showed us any sign of it. He wouldn't. I told you—he has pride."

I thought of Buno's stiff, upright back and the effort it must have cost him.

"It gets their hearts," said Pop. "A Martian heart isn't meant to pump all that extra weight of blood."

"Was there anything wrong with Buno's heart?"

"He wouldn't admit it, but I had him examined. The doctor said he wouldn't last another six months on Earth. So I sent Buno back home at once. He didn't want to go right away. He thought he could get you to understand maths pretty soon. Maybe he was right, but I couldn't take the risk."

I tried to look into his eyes but he stared up at the school facade, pretending an interest in architecture. Was it a tradition of space-

skippers, I wondered, to regard kindness as softness and try to conceal it? It was clear now from Buno's portrait that the Martian had understood my father better than I ever had.

I remembered my childish attack on Pop for sending Buno home, my accusing him of jealousy. Yet Pop had given up his life's chief hope to avoid risking the life of one of a supposedly lesser breed. How could I do less? Figuratively, I waved goodbye to a career in space, and said: "I'll write him express, Pop, and tell him not to come."

"Good," said Pop, quietly. He lowered his gaze and I saw that he looked very like his portrait.

I wrote Buno urgently, trying to counter all my arguments in my last letter. If he had any regard for me, I said, then stay put. I would soon come and see him—as a passenger. The express letter I reckoned, would get there a trifle before the one in the slow ordinary mail.

Therefore as I approached the house on the first day of my next vacation I was shocked when I saw him standing at the bottom of the garden and gazing out over the valley.

I dropped my baggage and hurried over to him. He heard me coming, turned, smiled—the same old warm, friendly smile.

"Buno!" I cried. "Didn't you get my letter?"

He continued to smile. "I got them both, Paul. You're in trouble. I had to come."

"But—"

He waved a deprecating hand. "I feel fine. I've seen the doctor. He says a month on Earth shouldn't hurt. That'll be time enough to get you well on to the home stretch."

"You shouldn't have come," I said, lamely. Gratitude and fear conflicted within me and sapped my spontaneity. I fumbled for his hand, clasped it, said "Thanks," and could think of nothing else to say except a perfunctory inquiry about Jona.

Pop would be out in space for all of two months yet and wouldn't even learn of Buno's visit until it was over.

Later, after a drink in the house, I loosened up and we really got talking, first about old times, then about painting. And then Buno made me unpack my maths books and notes, and out came the log tables, the slide rule, and a mass of graph paper, and he said seriously: "Time's short, Paul, so let's get started."

We got started. That was all. The 'phone began ringing and cars came rolling up the drive as regularly as though the house were a filling station. Buno had travelled incognito, so there had been no press reception at the space-port. But somehow his arrival had got around and the interviewers had tracked him here.

After all, he was probably the world's most famous artist now and had never been interviewed before. The reporters made up for lost time. He bore them patiently. I was glad for him because of this recognition, yet I kept wishing he'd raise a hand, say " That's enough, now," throw them all out—and attend to me.

But I had to write the rest of that day off and all of the next—when TV cameras came peering round the house like inquisitive robots.

It died away at last. Buno began to coach me in earnest. This time it was different. This time I wanted to learn. So I did—and fast.

On the eve of the first day of the examination session I said goodbye to Buno, adding: " I'll be back in a week with my navigator's ticket in my wallet."

" I'll be waiting," Buno smiled.

After the session the candidates had to stick around the School for another two days, awaiting the results. We passed the time mostly in one bar or another till at last the typewritten sheet was tacked up on the green baize. Then we returned to the bars, some of us to celebrate, some of us to drown our sorrows.

I was celebrating. I had cleared the first, and higher, of the two hurdles. I'd passed Space Navigation, Theory. Space Navigation, Practical, would be easy. I'd always been able to use my fingers pretty well—except for counting on.

Then I stopped hitting the bottle and drove home all the afternoon and half the evening and, surprisingly, didn't hit anything else either, except ninety.

A good percentage of alcohol in the blood always makes me feel fonder of people than I am normally. The house seemed full of rosy mist and I swam through it, from room to room, seeking Buno and calling blurrily: " Uncle Buno, I love you !"

He was in his own room sitting beside his easel. A part-done canvas rested there. The sunset glowed beyond the window and he seemed to be studying it. One hand held a brush. His palette lay on the floor before him.

I was full of tipsy *camaraderie* and affection. I slapped him on the back.

" Buno, old man, we've done it."

He tilted stiffly forward. He held the brush tightly and did not put out a hand to save himself. His face hit the floor, hard, half on the palette. He rolled sideways, one leg raised in the air a little, the colours of the rainbow smeared across his face, his white hair standing up fuzzily.

It was dreadfully reminiscent of the climax of a circus clown act.

But the sight of the blob of crimson lake on the cornea of an eye that was wide open wasn't at all funny.

Such a shock is supposed to sober one at once. But it only made me more confused.

Strangely, it took a tumbler of near-neat Scotch to steady me enough to take another look at Uncle Buno.

At least two previous sunsets must have flamed and died before his sightless eyes while he'd been sitting there. Now this one died too while I sat sobbing over him.

The doctor came sometime around midnight. I suppose I must have 'phoned him. I don't remember.

" It was his heart, I guess," he said.

I nodded heavily, still maudlin. " It was his heart," I said. " It was too big."

In due course I became a space-navigator. My ship was the *Flagstaff*, almost as new as my uniform. Pop came to see me off on my maiden flight—to Mars. He was as pleased and as excited as I was, but there was something on his mind.

He asked: " You're still calling on Jona ?"

" Of course, Pop. How could I dodge it ?"

" She won't be glad to see you, son. Best skip it."

" I'd never feel right about it if I did."

" She's okay, Paul. Thanks to your sending her those credits, she's the richest woman on Mars now."

" And the bitterest."

" Yes. And the bitterest. So stay away from her."

I shrugged. We'd had the argument before, and we each had our own answer, and no talk could change it now.

I didn't think much about it on the trip. The skipper was newly promoted too, and a worrying type. He was dubious about the new ship, dubious about the new navigator, and dubious about the new skipper. The latter he wouldn't admit, the ship couldn't hear him, and so I got the brunt of it all. He had me re-checking our position so often that I found myself nail-biting as much as he.

The landing came as a distinct relief.

But then Mars began to play its part in getting me down. It wasn't unattractive at first sight—the orange sandstone houses in the orange sandy desert, the still-surfaced canals, the cloudless blue sky.

But there was a pervading darkness about it. After a bit, you felt you were wearing smoked spectacles. At the time the planet was fifty million miles further away than Earth from the sun, which despite the thin clear air, gave noticeably less light.

The dark blue of the sky was too dark: it looked as though it had been painted with a brush previously used for black and not properly cleaned. The same shadow seemed to lay behind the other colours, of which there were few, for there were no flowers on Mars and the inhabitants dressed and lived drably.

You always felt it was the moment of dawn and subconsciously waited for the sun to rise. But, of course, it never became any lighter. The disappointment nagged, irrationally, breeding irritation. The tenuous atmosphere didn't help. You could breathe it, but only if you stood still and gulped. If you walked half a dozen paces you began to flounder like a landed fish. So most of the time you wore an oxygen mask, spoke muffledly, and had trouble with saliva.

Buno's village was like all the other Martian villages I'd seen, and his house was like all the other houses in the village. I had expected something better. Buno had been one of the few Martians to bring Earth credits back. And it was months now since I had sent Jona a fortune. Yet there were three cracked and patched window-panes.

In this village Buno was born. I doubted if the scene had changed since that day. Buno had grown up here with little to see but the harsh ochre plain and the slate-coloured canal. Yet he had become one of the greatest painters of all time.

Geniuses, I reflected, truly have an inner eye which sees a world beyond the material one.

Often in imagination I'd pictured myself approaching this house, smart in my new navigator's uniform. Now the reality was here—but the circumstances were miserably different.

I shrank from the encounter to come. But I knew I had to go through with it.

The door stood ajar, thick with its insulation against the freezing Martian night. I hesitated before it, feeling suddenly doubtful about the almost comically outsize bunch of flowers I carried. The problem of just the right present had worried me. All I'd learned that Jona prized were terrestrial household gadgets. But these were obtainable in any of the bigger Martian stores. I could only presume that now she was rich she already possessed all she needed in that line.

I badly wanted to say and do the right things. It would be all wrong to say: "Jona, I'm sorry. It's my fault you're a widow. Please accept this as a token of my regret"—and then hand her a vacuum cleaner.

Hence the flowers, beautiful and rare. Probably there were no flowers on Mars at the moment except these, brought from Earth, the life in them carefully and expensively preserved.

I had made no sound, but the door was pulled slowly open from

within. And there Jona stood watching me. I had noticed that sometimes Buno had sensed my approach without actually seeing or hearing me. Apparently his wife shared the faculty.

Like he, she was tall, thin, white-haired, with pink-rimmed but steady eyes—unnervingly steady now.

"I'm Paul," I blurted, indistinctly through my mask. "I—I brought you these."

I held out the flowers. She took them solemnly and silently. Now that my hands were empty I didn't know what to do with them. I stuck them in my pockets but felt that was impolite and withdrew them. Then they felt like a pair of silly, dangling appendages.

She watched me unblinkingly. Somehow I felt like a kid dressed up in his father's uniform.

"I came to say how sorry I am about Uncle Buno," I said, in my best Martian but still muffled by that damned oxygen mask. "I feel, you know, it was all my fault."

She nodded gravely, which didn't help at all. Pa had said she was bitter. I knew that many of the Martians were bitter towards our race, because they'd reached their apex of material civilization with the canal system, and then fallen away from it without ever having mastered space travel.

They'd failed to escape from their dying world and were dying with it. Whereas we, a younger race, were possessed of a rich, living world and yet could leave it whenever we chose. They resented our vigour, our youth, our wealth, our power, and they chose to pretend we liked to flaunt them in their faces. They had one hell of an inferiority complex, together with its concomitant pride.

But Jona had a personal reason to be bitter. I'd rather she showed it, screamed and clawed, than gravely agree with my self-accusations. It made me feel so completely condemned, that atonement or forgiveness were not to be considered.

She made no move to invite me in.

I clasped and unclasped my useless hands, then said all in a rush: "Uncle Buno was the greatest man I ever knew. And the kindest. I could never repay what I owe him. But I should like to be the first to write his biography. Of course, I can't presume to judge his works. That must be left to someone better qualified. I just want to describe what sort of *person* he was, what he thought of life and art and so forth. I was wondering if he left any personal papers that I might borrow for the purpose. I promise you I'll be most discreet and publish nothing without your approval."

My voice died away because Jona was regarding me with such intensity that I wondered whether I was exciting her enthusiasm or her hatred.

She nodded sharply, and said in a strangled sort of voice: "Wait."

She closed the door to. A couple of minutes later she reappeared, thrust a small cloth-bound book into my hands and then shut the door between us with finality.

I sighed, half with relief, half with regret. I looked at the book. The neatly formed Martian writing was recognizably Buno's. It appeared to be a volume of a private journal. It began, I noted, on the day Buno returned to Earth from Mars.

I leafed through it and it was as though the book became a living viper in my hands. Phrase after phrase darted out at me like a forked, venomous tongue.

"*That pampered little fool, Paul . . . No wonder the mother abandoned her idiot child . . . The humiliation of having to be civil to him . . . Trying to get simple self-evident facts through his thick skull was like trying to push your finger through a wall . . . His father is a typical specimen of that culturally backward race, arrogant because they were handed paradise on a plate . . . Another infuriating letter today from the moronic Paul . . .*"

I snapped the book shut, crushing those hurtful fangs back in there. The blind-windowed house, itself tightly shut, seemed to sway before me. But it was I who was rocking. The poison had entered my bloodstream and the shock was beginning.

Somehow I blundered away in an erratic curve, which, as it lengthened, revealed to me the area back of the house. And there was a pit half full of smashed terrestrial gadgets: a refrigerator, a washing machine, a cooker, cleaners, things large and small. As I looked at them as dully and uncomprehendingly as the moron *he'd* said I was, a back-door opened and my offering of flowers was tossed out, into the pit.

I never even glimpsed Jona's hand. Perhaps because of the silly, childish tears filling my eyes. I turned away again, seeking blindly for the haven of the ship, and the tears wouldn't stop but ran over the oxygen mask and besprinkled my stiff new uniform.

In my pain I lost my precarious grip on the art of walking under the Martian gravity. My feet became almost beyond control and lifted me in high-floating steps. Altogether, bouncing, zig-zagging, and blubbering, I must have looked ridiculous. All-conquering Earthman! No doubt I was a joke to the Martian villagers, behind their closed windows, and balm to their bruised egos.

The Captain was as fretful as ever on the voyage back, but this time I was glad of it. The constant neurotic double-checkings helped to

save me from too much brooding about Buno and Jona and their contemptuous rejection of me.

When I got home I wasn't at first going to tell Pop about it. But the mystery nagged at me like an aching nerve. Why? I'd thought Buno had, in his way, loved me, risked his life to help me—and lost it. Then *why* . . .? Why in his recorded private thoughts did he seldom mention me without a dislike at times amounting to hatred? Only Pop might know. So I told him about it, after all.

He read the Journal slowly, because he wasn't all that good at Martian.

When he laid it aside at last, I asked: "Well? Can you explain why he was such a great man and yet so two-faced?"

Pop smiled faintly. "That combination isn't peculiar to Martians. Think of Richard Wagner. No—don't. It would be a false comparison. Buno was never two-faced. He was just two persons."

"What do you mean?"

"Paul, I once mentioned that pair of Martians working at Washington Spaceport. Have you ever conversed with them? I have. The gravity drag cripples them. In time it will kill them. But they are calm and amiable. Yet the average Martian—*on Mars*—is suspicious, envious, spiteful, always beefing. We're so largely the creatures of our environment, you see."

I reflected, then said: "Buno, in the Journal, kept referring to Earth as paradise. As Paradise Lost, in fact. It was almost as though he blamed us for dispossessing him."

"Yes, Paul, it was sheer jealousy, and you became the focal point of that jealousy. Buno was a born artist. But he never became an inspired one until he saw Earth, with its beautifully coloured flora and fauna, its landscapes and—above all—its cloudscapes and sunsets. He'd never seen such marvellous play of light before. What a contrast to Mars, with its weak sunlight, its cloudless sky of one monotonous hue, its feeble range of colour . . . In the Journal there are two whole pages of ecstasy about a remembered rainbow."

"I know, Pop. But why did he pick on me?"

"You're the lad he would have given everything to be, with all Earth to paint and all a lifetime to do it. He could never hope to live here for more than a few months, *in toto*. He envied your opportunities, despised you because you couldn't make use of them the way he would have done."

I sighed. "And all that was fermenting in him while I thought he was helping me only from kindness."

"It didn't ferment in him *here*," said Pop. "Only on Mars. Here he *was* kind and helpful. He was two different people in two different

places. To some extent we all are. On Mars I always feel depressed and take things hard. I expect you did too. And it's a lot tougher for the Martians—it was toughest of all for Buno, with his artistic temperament. I think the thin Martian air is mostly to blame: the Martians are oxygen-starved. It devitalizes them, makes them morose and irritable. It would do the same for us, if it weren't for the oxygen masks."

"Then we should supply all Martians with oxygen masks."

Pop shrugged. "There's more to it than oxygen. There's some other element missing from their atmosphere which we have. Maybe one of the inert gases. Maybe some other infinitesimal but important constituent that gives our air sparkle. Buno breathed freely and saw clearly in his short time on Earth. On Mars he was sick physically and in his soul, like the others. Think of him always as you knew him, when he was healthy."

"I shall," I said, picking up the Journal. "I'm going to burn this." I hesitated. "Let's face it, Pop, he didn't return to Earth just to help me."

"That's right, son. And so you can't be blamed. Your letter was the excuse he needed. He wanted to see Earth again before he died, and paint again, because Mars was making him impotent as an artist. Painting was his life. He came back to Earth to live—and die."

"It was hard on Jona."

"Yes. She loved him, and I think he loved her—but not so much as he loved art. Now she curses everything terrestrial. Earth stole away her husband."

"I'd hate her to go on feeling that way for the rest of her life. Do you think, Pop, we can ever persuade her to come and stay with us for a short holiday, just so that we can meet the real Jona? And she can meet the real us?"

Pop shook his head. "Never. But there's one hope. There's a plan already under way to re-oxygenate the whole Martian atmosphere. Oxygen can be recovered from the deserts there. We must make our scientists understand that's still not enough. They've got to track down the other vital element in our atmosphere, and introduce that. That's the one way we can help Jona."

"You're right, Pop." I thought a little while, and became conscious of the kindling of a purpose. I added, quietly: "It's the only way we can repay Uncle Buno, too."

—William F. Temple